Fix How You Hire

Simple Steps to Repair Five Common Mistakes Hiring Managers Make

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Introduction
Five Critical Hiring Mistakes

Hiring top performers is a critical success factor in your career. The recruitment market is extremely competitive and top performers are ALWAYS in high demand. Avoid these 5 common mistakes, and you will stay on the road to success and make hiring an enabler of your success and not an obstacle:

1) **Not investing time in scoping the role** - Taking time to consider exactly what you want and need for your next hire is a critical step in the hiring process. Too often, leaders accept a boiler plate job description given to them from HR or reuse the description from a previous hire. You should always take some quiet time with a blank piece of paper to consider the current and future needs of your company and create a current wish list of skills along with the outcomes you want from this new hire in the next 12 months. Keep this list close as you evaluate candidates and use it as a guide when making your final hiring decision.

2) **Falling in love with personality** - Getting too hung up on personality is a trap that many leaders fall into. Good leaders balance culture fit with experience and accomplishments. Past performance predicts future performance. Don't ignore this fact because you get along with the candidate. Many of the worst hires you can make are extremely likable people. They just don't produce. Look for past accomplishments, relevant experiences, job progression, and sticking power in their past jobs.

3) **Not planning how the work will get done until the job gets filled -** Too often leaders become desperate to hire someone—anyone. This is a common cause for poor hires. Hiring great people takes time. 60 to 90 days is the industry average. You will need to have a plan to get the work done in the interim. Giving others on your team increased responsibility, renegotiating goals with leadership, and hiring temporary help or consultants are all good options. Take the time as soon as you have an opening to consider how critical it is to get the work done. It will buy you the time you need to hire the best person without the pressure of being understaffed clouding your judgment.

4) **Failure to acknowledge the market and adapt** - Getting too focused on your job description and doggedly sticking to the profile created as part of an isolated job scoping process is a recipe for failure. Once you understand the market for your role, you must adapt and identify the best individual to accomplish the goals you laid out in your plan. This means you must be willing to compromise some of the requirements on your wish list in order to create a successful hire.

5) **Not selling your vision -** As previously stated, top performers in your industry have many choices. So

why should they choose to work for you? You must consider this and be able to clearly articulate the value proposition to your candidates.

By avoiding these common mistakes, you can maximize your opportunity to hire a top performing individual and avoid a mis-hire.

Fix Mistake Number One
Scope Your Role

Scoping out your role is a critical step to hiring the right person. *You need to see the successful hire in your mind before you can create it.* Too often execs jump right into the hiring process without considering a few critical questions:

What will this person need to do for you, the company, or the team? – What created the role? Is it a replacement or a new addition? Regardless of the genesis of the position, don't just go and create a carbon copy of the person who left or use your sales pitch to get the new role to hire. If it's a replacement, consider what the previous person did well and what you would have changed if you had a magic wand. If it's a new role, you get to start from scratch.

Either way, you should sit down with a blank piece of paper to outline the critical things you are looking for this person to accomplish in 3 months, 6 months, one year, and long term.

What will this person bring to the table? – Defining your needs comes after defining the output of the new role for a reason. Past performance predicts future performance, so use your expected outcomes to define your needs. Consider both traits and competencies here.

Trait - Personality trait is often ingrained. These are the types of characteristics people have had for most of their lives. Personality traits are often deep-seated and difficult to learn or unlearn. Examples of traits would be things like work ethic, attention to detail, and attitude.

Competency - Typically a mix between behaviors and skills. If you have strong leadership competencies, it's understood that you may have behavior patterns that are strengthened by certain skills you have developed over time. Generally, competencies are measures of how well you do certain things, taking into consideration your knowledge, skills, and attributes. Competencies are generally behaviors that are easily identified and measured. Think of these as job-related skills such as software, leadership, or other technical skills.

The best practice in defining your role is to focus 80% on traits and 20% on competencies. This helps avoid being overly focused on technical skills and hiring individuals who lack the interpersonal and leadership skills to be successful.

Why would this individual want to work for you? – Defining why a top performer would want the job you're offering is often skipped. Too often people just assume that their job will be attractive.

Remember, the best candidates usually have multiple options. You must be able to articulate why a top performer would want your job.

Think about what this role will lead to for a top performer and what's interesting about you, the company, and the group. It's time to sell your job, and the first rule of sales is to explain the obvious. Just because you think the job is great doesn't mean other people will know it from the start. This is the time to explain why this position is interesting or exciting to a top performer.

While defining your role does not guarantee you will end up hiring a star performer, it does set you up ahead of 95% of hiring mangers who fail to execute this critical step. These steps will help maximize your chances of making a great hire and minimize the potential for a mis-hire.

Fix Mistake Number Two
Avoid the Personality Trap

Falling in love with personality - Getting too hung up on personality is a trap that many leaders fall into. Good leaders balance culture fit with experience and accomplishments. Past performance predicts future performance. Don't ignore this fact because you get along with the candidate. Many of the worst hires you can make are extremely likable people. They just don't produce. Look for past accomplishments, relevant experiences, job progression, and sticking power in their past jobs.

To avoid this trap, you must have a well-planned yet flexible interview process.

Identify and Engage an Effective Interview Team

- Take some time to pick an interview team that will provide honest and well-rounded feedback.
- Your team should be no more than 3 to 5 people, and they should represent a range of perspectives. Don't just pick people that think like you. People with different experiences and work styles will focus on different things, giving you a broader perspective.
- Invest time in preparing your interview team with a 30-minute call or meeting to review your position profile and key things you're looking for, as well as to determine who should focus on what in order to provide a more focused interview process and better feedback.

Develop Your Interviewing Skills

Interviewing is a skill—invest time and resources to develop your skills. There are many great training programs and books, so make it a priority to develop your skills and those of your team.

Develop and Listen to Your Hiring "Gut"

- Classic business books like *Blink* by Malcom Gadwell and *Straight from the Gut* by Jack Welch reinforce the importance of developing your senses when it comes to making decisions. This skill can be developed—you need to learn to listen for the right information and listen to your own internal computer.
- Don't make hiring decisions out of consensus. The right person for you is the right person for you. In the end, you have to train, coach, and lead this individual, and you will be responsible for letting them go if you make a poor decision. So take responsibility for the decision. Take input from others as just that, input.

Overall, hiring people for their skills and experience, combined with our first step of properly scoping your job, will greatly reduce the risk of “falling in love with personality.”

Fix Mistake Number Three
What to do Until Help Arrives

Too often leaders become desperate to hire someone—anyone. This is a common cause for poor hires. Hiring great people in takes time. 60 to 90 days is the industry average. You will need to have a plan to get the work done in the interim. Giving others on your team increased responsibility, renegotiating goals with leadership, and hiring temporary help or consultants are all good options. Take the time as soon as you have an opening to consider how critical it is to get the work done. It will buy you the time you need to hire the best person without the pressure of being understaffed clouding your judgment.

This issue often occurs under two scenarios:

New Headcount:

Promises and planning - Often, leaders make big promises to get headcount approved, or they make the inexperienced mistake of planning too little time to identify talent and productivity on day 1. As a leader, your plan needs to be realistic. Get input from a recruiter in your technical area or HR so that you can plan how long it will take to find someone and make them productive instead of setting unrealistic expectations for yourself and your new hire. Hiring great people takes time, so set appropriate expectations.

Long approval process or tight budgets - Another issue that can occur with new headcount is that the approval process to actually get the talent you need can be so time consuming or difficult that you and your team become shorthanded and desperate by the time your need is approved. If you're a senior leader, you need to consider the impact you're creating on productivity with your process. If you're the recipient of this type of situation, you need to seriously consider if you're in the right place. If you can't get the resources you need, are you really being set up for success? There are plenty of companies and leaders that understand that having the right people is the key to growth and success. You cannot save your way to growth. It takes investment and planning.

Unplanned Headcount - Resignations and Last Minute High Priority Projects:

Too often, unexpected projects that require new headcount, or worse, resignation of a key employee, create an unplanned urgent need. This type of situation creates high risk for a mis-hire since you may become desperate.

The key here is to accept that this is an imperfect situation and compose the best plan you can to overcome the obstacle, set expectations with stakeholders, and win.

Developing your plan

Develop a solid plan based on market data. Don't plan on 2 weeks to fill a challenging quality role when the market average in 60 days. Speak to HR or headhunters with solid experience to give you a good estimate of how long it will take to identify, interview, and onboard your talent. Plan how you will get the work done. Consider the following resources:

a. External Consultants
b. Contingent or temporary employees
c. Members of your team
d. Members of your company not on your team that can take on more

Renegotiating expectations

Another solid option when faced with an unplanned shortfall of resources is to go back to stakeholders and renegotiate deliverables. Good leaders are great at prioritization; you need to be able to identity the non-critical tasks that will need to wait or be done by others.

Building a realistic strategy to keep things going forward while you identify and onboard talent will give you a competitive advantage. Hires made quickly out of desperation rarely work out.

Fix Mistake Number Four
Adapt to the Market

One of the most damaging mistakes that leaders make is to ignore the realities of the job market. Your goal in hiring is not to identify the "perfect" person who fits every bullet on your job description. The goal is to build a team that can accomplish the deliverables that you as a leader are responsible for delivering to your organization.

Sticking doggedly to a profile created without the reality of the market can leave a job open for way too long. There are three major items to consider:

Identify the cost of not filling your job - Do some rough math. What is the estimated cost per month of not filling your opening? For a sales rep, this is easy to do. Let's say it's a rep with a 5M annual quota. That's 100K in sales per week that you are not bringing in by not filling the job.
Engineers can be more challenging, but give it a shot. If they are working on a 100M product that will launch next year, what is the cost of delay for each week or month not filling the job?

Ensure that you have thoroughly assessed the market - In order to adapt to a market, you must have confidence that you understand it. Many managers wait for the ideal candidate to come across their desk without any knowledge of the market. Depending on your approach to identifying talent, you can either wait and hope or proactively map the market and methodically access the talent available.

Here at Med Device Talent, we identify between 100 to 150 individuals for each role we work on and methodically contact them. This process not only identifies the best candidates as quickly as possible, but also yields valuable market data useful in making a final decision. While results for individual roles vary, by using this process we typically identify 3 qualified candidates within the first 30 days.

You can gather this type of data from your HR team in order to understand who they have contacted and what the market looks like for your role. The faster you can understand the market and the more deeply you can penetrate the market, the faster you will fill your job with the best talent available.

Adapting to the market and making a decision - Now that you understand the cost of not filling your role and the market for the talent, you are in a position to trade off some of the "nice to have" Traits and Competencies for time. Meaning, the more urgent and costly it is to not have a position filled, the more you may have to compromise. The important point is that you realistically look at your current position and make

decisions. Leaders who fail to hire, fail to adapt. They often live in fear of making a poor hire and never actually make the hire. Great employees can be developed since there is rarely the perfect candidate. It’s your job to identify the right talent and keep moving forward.

Fix Mistake Number Five
Sell Your Vision

Effective interview processes not only assess the abilities and fit of potential employees, but goes further and actually “sells” the candidate on the opportunity.

People go to work for companies not only because they need a job, but also because they like the company, team, and people they will be working for. When you identify that the person you are interviewing is a good fit, it’s time to shift into sales mode. It’s important to express to the candidate what’s in it for them. I don’t just mean salary here. This is about opportunity…

Consider the following items to articulate to a candidate:

What could this job lead to?
What’s exciting about the company, group, or yourself. I don’t mean just the standard we are growing blah blah blah. It’s time for specifics.

How and why is the company growing?

What are the plans for your group?

What impact will the role have on the company or group?
What gets you excited about coming to work every day?

There are many more to add to the list, but consider providing the benefits or "what’s in for me" to the candidate you want to attract. It just might help you land that “A Player.”

About the Author

Mike Adamo an author of career and recruitment books. He is the founder of boutique executive search firm named Med Device Talent. With almost twenty years' experience in medical device recruitment, including leading corporate talent acquisition and 3rd party executive search, Mike is one of the industry's leading talent acquisition experts. Mike's mission is to help organizations and individuals grow by aligning talented individuals with exceptional opportunities. Med Device Talent is a full-service talent acquisition provider to the medical device industry.

Prior to founding Med Device Talent, Adamo was the recruiting leader for Edwards Lifesciences for over 10 years. He was the top recruiting expert, leading the company's growth from 5,000 to 10,000 employees. During his tenure, he led the recruitment of over 100 of the company's top executives, including corporate vice presidents, board members, and operating leaders.

Adamo led major hiring scaleups in Singapore, China, and the US. He consulted on projects in Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Adamo was at the recruiting helm as the company scaled up R&D, Regulatory, Clinical, Marketing, and Sales to launch the world's first Trans Cather Heart Valve.

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